

# **Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Climate-Smart Sanctuary Initiative BACKGROUND INFORMATION (DRAFT)**

## **Overview**

Climate change has been acknowledged as the greatest natural threat facing the planet today. Everyone, as individuals and as parts of families, businesses, communities, and agencies, is asking, What can I do? Alone, we can do little. Even as a large marine protected area network, NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System (NMSS), is limited in what it can do. Many protected areas have not been able to do as much as they would like to deal with impacts from climate change, due to uncertainty about what to do, lack of resources, or both. But the NMSS has been entrusted with the stewardship of many of the most ecologically, economically, and socially important marine resources in U.S. waters. To do nothing is not an option.

Additionally, internationally, MPA managers are struggling with the same problem. At the recent Second International Marine Protected Areas Congress (May 2009), one of the messages that was brought forth was that although there is increasing discussion of what role MPAs can play in climate impact adaptation and mitigation, far more work is needed in figuring out how to make that actually happen.

The NMSS is therefore developing a Climate-Smart Sanctuary Initiative as a way to prepare the climate site scenario/story, and then organize and implement a climate action plan at each site and receive the certification "Climate-Smart Sanctuary" as a way to indicate they have made certain efforts and achieved a set of standards. The certification standards, evaluation process, and certifying body and methods are currently being developed by NMSS and piloted in the Gulf of Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

These NMSS efforts support larger agency efforts toward NOAA's climate goal (Understand climate variability and change to enhance society's ability to plan and respond) as well as enhance NOAA's compliance with Executive Order 13423 (Strengthening Federal Environmental, Energy and Transportation Management). The NMSS provides and/or supports some of NOAA's climate capacities (History of Marine Animal Populations (HMAP), ocean acidification, sentinel sites, climate literacy), as well as being a customer (experts, data, modeling, and forecasting). The NMSS provides the place-based focal point that puts all of NOAA's climate capabilities to work in protecting marine resources.

## **Benefits of Climate-Smart Sanctuaries**

At its most basic level, this effort answers the question posed earlier What can we do? and helps the NMSS and NOAA meet mandated stewardship responsibilities by protecting sanctuary resources and contributing toward larger efforts designed to help manage for and mitigate climate change impacts. It also answers the question What will we do? and demonstrates to the community that action can and should be taken. Climate site scenario/story and action plan templates and documents, the processes used to prepare them, and the standards and process for certification can be exported and adapted for other domestic and international marine protected areas.

## **Standards for Certification**

The standards for certifying sites as Climate-Smart must meet several requirements. They must:

- Help a site plan and manage for climate change impacts;
- Be rigorous enough to be meaningful;
- Be realistically achievable in a poor fiscal climate;
- Address the primary functional areas of an MPA (science/research, education/outreach, and management); and
- Address the day-to-day MPA operations of maintaining facilities, running vessels, and interacting with the community.

Please see Attachment 1 for a full list of the certification standards. These standards are specific for the sites in the NMSS.

### **Proposed Certification Process**

In order for a certification to be considered credible, it needs to be approved by objective experts through an impartial, well-documented process. The Climate-Smart Sanctuary certification will be made in the following process (also see Figure 1):

#### **1. Form a Local Review Team.**

Each site will form their own Local Review Team to be composed of a minimum of three representatives chosen from outside ONMS, and one representative from the ONMS Climate Subcommittee. The external members are to represent the following areas of expertise:

- Protected areas – Consider a colleague from a partner federal or state park.
- Climate sciences – Consider a colleague from a local RISA program (Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments program through the NOAA Climate Program Office), a researcher at a local university, or a science partner from another state or local agency.
- Facilities – Consider a colleague from NOAA’s Facilities programs, or a local, state, or other federal partner.

Other expert representatives may be added if a site desires.

#### **2. Conduct an orientation call for the members of the Local Review Team to present expectations and ensure familiarity with the process and standards of Climate-Smart Sanctuary Certification.**

#### **3. Schedule a full-day assessment visit by the Local Review Team. The meeting should include a thorough presentation of necessary documentation and tour of facilities.**

#### **4. Document achievement of or substantive progress toward each of the standards identified above (see Attachment 3 for a report format for this). Submit documentation to the Local Review Team at least 30 days before the Climate-Smart Sanctuary certification assessment visit.**

5. Conduct Climate-Smart Sanctuary certification assessment visit and provide any clarifications or additions to documentation as requested by the Local Review Team.
6. The Local Review Team has thirty days to make their findings and recommendations, and submit them as a report to the ONMS's Executive Team.
7. The Executive Team has thirty days to review the report from the Local Review Team and decide if the site has achieved or is making substantive progress toward all of the standards.
8. If the Executive Team decides that a site has achieved or is making substantive progress toward all of the standards, it will be certified as Climate Smart (see Attachment 4 for a certificate format). A press release or public ceremony can be held announcing the certification. The certification is good for a period of ten years, after which it may be revisited.
9. If the Executive Team decides that a site has NOT achieved or is making substantive progress toward all of the standards, it will make recommendations on how to address deficiencies. The site can take action to address those deficiencies, prepare new documentation, and reform the Local Review Team to prepare a new report for the Executive Team.

The Executive Team will serve as the certifying authority for the NMSS for the foreseeable future. As more sites initiate the Climate Smart process, and more partners become involved, the NMSS may consider an outside Certifying Authority with expertise in such areas as:

- protected area and/or resource management expertise
- climate adaptation/management planning and implementation
- climate literacy principles and outreach methods
- climate science and monitoring
- green operations/facilities.